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ABSTRACT

The purpose of Project P.I.A.G.E.T. (Promoting Intellectual Adaptation Given Experiential Transforming) is to provide plans and procedures to develop bilingual children's self-concepts. This Title VII project, judged successful after 1 year of implementation, works with bilingual families in both the home and school settings. Its objectives include enhancing self-concept, increasing learning achievement, and developing more positive communication and interaction between child and parent. Lower socioeconomic status and a high unemployment rate characterize the bilingual families in the project. The program operates on six basic aspects of learning and growth: (1) acquisition of intelligence, (2) specific linguistic/cognitive benchmarks crucial to growth, (3) experiences to expand language and cognitive growth, (4) self-regulation of learning, (5) social interaction, and (6) children's play. These aspects provide the baseline for self-concept development. Specific activities in the home (grouped according to the dimensions of body self, social self, cognitive self, and self-esteem) may be used by parents to foster healthy self-concepts in their children. These activities include singing songs containing the child's name, reading to the child, role playing, and constructing "me" books. (BJD)

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INCREASING SELF CONCEPTS OF YOUNG BILINGUAL CHILDREN IN HOME SETTINGS: DISCOVERING THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN PROJECT P.I.A.G.E.T. – TITLE VII[1]

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Increasing Self Concepts of Young Bilingual Children in Home Settings: Discovering the Role of Parents in Project P.I.A.G.E.T. - Title VII

Introduction

Self concept is a global entity or configuration of the self yet according to Rogers (1951); it is admissible to observation in children's actions and statements. It comprises elements such as individual's ideas of self in relation to others and perceptions of his abilities and characteristics (Rogers, 1952; Gomez & Yawkey, 1980).

Writers and researchers for example, Erikson (1963), Brookover, Shailor and Paterson (1964), and Workman and Stillion (1974) show repeatedly that self concept is significant to learning and development. According to Erikson (1950) and Jersild (1952), the self concept an individual holds of himself plays a strong role in his academic achievement in the three basic R's of reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic and in the fourth R of relationships - i.e., the ability of individuals to share and work cooperatively together (Yawkey, 1980). According to Brookover, Shailor and Paterson (1964), self concept encourages the learning and mastery of the academic school concepts and Workman and Stillman (1974) note that individual's positive perceptions of themselves can increase -- creative thinking -- or in the case of negative perceptions -- decrease it.

Oral and written language is at minimum a part of the communication process and at maximum one of the three R's -- reading. And, its development and mastery is associated with self concept. The young bilingual child who develops, ".....a usage of two languages or is dominant in a language other than English has a distinct problem in communication . . and . . in self perception (Gomez & Yawkey, 1980, p. 187)." Because of the English language problems set within bilingual and bicultural perspectives and related situational factors (e.g., high rate of unemployment),

bilingual children tend to show high incidences of negative self concept (Carter & Segura, 1979). However, regardless of the bilingual population from which the children come, they should be able to develop and maintain a positive self concept of themselves equally as well as other children assuming the institutions such as the family and school are supportive (Cervantes & Bernal, 1976; Deblassie & Healey, 1970). Relative to increasing or at least maintaining a positive self concept, this article examines the contributions that can be made by bilingual parents through educational training to work with their own children in home settings. These contributions from home (and school) can encourage self concept.

Contributions of Bilingual Parents to Self Concept

From results of research studies conducted over two decades, it is apparent that parents contribute much to the development of self concepts of their children (Thomas, 1972; Kelly, 1955). For example, children's evaluation of themselves, their levels of aspirations, and maturity of personality are highly correlated with their parent's perceptions of themselves (Kelly, 1955). In addition, the quality and quantity of parental assistance given to children on school tasks, in home settings, are very highly correlated with parental aspirations for them (Soars & Soars, 1970). Originating with the family, Combs and Super (1964) identify the crucial factors for children's positive self concept as: (1) closeness between the child and parent, (2) types of discipline used by the parent and, (3) follow-through of the child on completing tasks that are appropriate to his developmental level. Accordingly, for young bilingual (and monolingual) children, several key variables for positive self concept are parental aspirations for their childrens' expectations and parental assistance given to them on school related tasks. These variables become even more important when they are compounded by the problems of poverty, social class, and lower socioeconomic status (Soars & Soars), 1970). These aspirations, within a cultural milieu, begin to shape the bilingual child's self concept at birth and together

with other factors continue to modify it throughout the preschool and early elementary school years.

The bilingual (like the monolingual) child is a product of the culture in which he lives (Snygg & Combs, 1949). Social pressures are placed on the child so that he behaves appropriately. At first, parents pressure the child to act in accord with their expectations. As youngsters grow older, these pressures come from friends and other adults, who are close to the child. Thus the child is learning to define the world around him according to his culture.

As a child grows and interacts with others, he begins to view himself in terms of the kinds of family and cultural experiences he has. This includes the way he is treated by those responsible for his development. According to Mead's (1954) "looking glass self," the way people act and react to a child is like a mirror which the child holds up to himself. It reflects an image of the self which the child evaluates as he might evaluate someone else. In other words, whether the child is loved, praised, punished, rejected, fails, or succeeds determines whether the child views himself as important, unimportant, handsome, ugly, smart, or dumb. The way a child views himself governs the type of self-concept he possesses. Therefore as the child interacts with others, his self-concept is being shaped and molded.

And, a person acts in a way that is consistent with his self-concept (Snygg & Combs, 1949). If a child has a poor self-concept and feels he is not athletic, he defends this view to the end regardless of the circumstances. Along these same lines, a child's self-concept determines the way the child perceives a situation. Again, if a child has a poor self-concept and feels he is a failure, in every situation no matter if he succeeds or not, he will always view himself as failing -- "he hears what he wants to hear."

To modify and reshape a child's self-concept, he must have repeated experiences where he has success and is encouraged and praised. This involves

interacting with concerned adults, who can nurture and develop positive self-concepts.

With research data on self concept, school achievement and parental roles in nurturing positive self concept and learning abilities, Head Start and Follow-Through problems of the 1960's to 1980's focused on ameliorating failure with parents and their children from lower-socioeconomic levels in home (and classroom) programs (Yawkey, 1982).

Many of the Title VII-ESEA funded demonstration projects for bilingual children are aiming their resources at training parents to work with bilingual children in home (and school) settings. In the home programs, these Title VII projects, with parents, emphasize positive self concept development of (themselves and) their children, provide instruction procedures that bilingual parents can use with their youngsters in home settings, and stress closer personal and interactive communication and relationships between them (Yawkey, 1983).

Project P.I.A.G.E.T.: Hispanic-Bilingual

Project P.I.A.G.E.T.: Promoting Intellectual Adaptation Given Experiential Transforming is an on-going Title VII Demonstration Project that began in 1981. It is funded by The United States Department of Education, Office of Bilingual Education and Languages Affairs and sponsored by The Bethlehem (PA) Area School District with The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. Through its two instructional components of home and school, Project P.I.A.G.E.T. focuses on five major goals (Yawkey, 1983). They are:

a) developing proficiency of Hispanic bilingual children in English language, while extending the use and growth of the Spanish language

b) working with the Hispanic bilingual parents of program children to show and model instructional methods and routines of working with their children at home to increase self concepts, academic abilities, and aspirations, and parent-child communication

c) taking advantage of the young child's formative years -- the foundation for present and future growth

d) contributing to home, school, and community relations by using the common goal and desire of both bilingual family and school for the child's constructive growth

e) educating the whole child by recognizing that language systems are interrelated and interdependent with other major areas of child's growth and with his family and bilingual-sociocultural milieu.

Each of these five objectives are implemented in the home and center components of Project P.I.A.G.E.T. In Project PI.A.G.E.T.'s home component the five objectives focus on self concept enhancement, greater learning achievement, and more positive communication and interaction between child and parent.

The results of the first project year, 1981-1982 show that parent's perceptions of these children's social, academic and communication abilities significantly increased; parent's attitudes toward their children also increased in a positive direction. In addition, parent's own self concepts and feelings of adequacy in dealing with their children's problems and school-related matters also increased. A related result showed that parents' attitudes toward the school were very positive when their children began and completed the academic year, while the control group parents began the school year with very positive attitudes toward the school but ended it with negative attitudes toward it. The results with the bilingual children were equally successful in showing significant increases in self perceptions, as well as English language growth and curricular content knowledge of reading and mathematics.

From Project P.I.A.G.E.T.'s results, it appears that self concept of both bilingual child and parent can be enhanced and that greater parental aspirations for their children and greater communication between them are related to significant

increases in both parent and child perceptions of their behaviors in home and school settings. In expanding self concepts of bilingual children and parents, similar increases and significant relationships were obtained in the programs developed and tested by Hurst (1973), Pierce-Hones (1968) and Nimnicht, Meier and McAfee (1962).

Characteristics of Bilingual Children and Parents Served by Project P.I.A.G.E.T.

The bilingual children and parents served by Project P.I.A.G.E.T. represent a lower socioeconomic population as determined by high unemployment rates, high rates of public assistance, largely public rental housing in which they live, and Hispanic neighborhoods in which they reside. In addition, the population has migrated from rural and agricultural sections of central Puerto Rico. In seeking to avoid the ghettoes of the large nearby metropolitan cities, they have come to find employment. They have brought with them poor education and a language other than English. All the children enrolled in Project P.I.A.G.E.T. are bilingual -- and show poor language growth and acquisition in both Spanish and English.

In context of the above setting, there are six basic assumptions of learning and growth upon which this bilingual program operates. These assumptions focus on both the parents and the children served by the project. First, the classroom program focuses on aiding the children's acquisition of intelligence. From a self concept perspective, bilingual children, who develop thinking processes for language and cognition and use them in problem solving situations with positive environmental feedback, can increase their own perceptions of themselves.

Second, the bilingual child displays specific linguistic/cognitive benchmarks or characteristics that are crucial to present and future growth. These benchmarks and characteristics become powerful tools for assessing, diagnosing, and prescribing experiences for language growth. The third characteristic focuses on the type of experience that can expand language and cognitive growth. The bilingual child improves self perceptions of his English and Spanish language through uses of

concrete objects and things as precursors to the development of symbol systems in both languages.

The fourth characteristic focuses on the child's own self regulation of learning. The bilingual children's interests and needs determine many of the activities he pursues at school and home. Self concept is nurtured because the bilingual youngster makes choices, identifies goals, and can proceed to accomplish them. In addition, he can work on these goals at his own pace. The fifth characteristic involves social interaction. Through social interaction between children and between child and adult, self concept can be enhanced. As a product of mutual interchange, bilingual children can feel that their ideas are accepted. Feeling that they can share ideas and opinions without reprimand, the bilingual child can develop self-assertion and cooperation with each other.

The sixth assumption stresses that child's play is crucial to growth and learning. For self concept, child's play contributes to constructive cooperation with other youngsters. The ability to express themselves in play settings and act out situations aides the self concept.

The above six characteristics provide a baseline for the self concept to grow and develop within the program. Each of these characteristics of self concept, are supported by activities in the home (and classroom) components of the program. Examples of related activities from Project P.I.A.G.E.T.'s home program follow.

Self Concept Activities

The bilingual parents of Project P.I.A.G.E.T. are trained by para aides, who visit their homes on a weekly basis. They are shown how to use self concept activities and other experiences in home settings to compliment, reinforce and extend those activities their children receive in Project P.I.A.G.E.T.'s classroom component. The self concept activities in Project P.I.A.G.E.T. are broken down into four dimensions. They are: (a) body self (or body image) (b) cognitive self, (c) social

self, and (d) self-esteem (Samuels, 1977). "In other words, we put value on our bodies, our academic ability, and ourselves in rolls as students, friends, or son or daughter and we use adjectives such as good or bad to describe ourselves in each of these dimensions (Samuels, 1977, p. 33)."

First, self concept activities used in Project P.I.A.G.E.T. emphasize the way a person feels about his body is directly related to his feelings about himself as a total person (Secord & Jourard, 1953). For a child's body image to fully develop, he must separate himself from others especially his mother. For example, Mahler, Pine and Bergman (1975) found that as a child grows older he moves from a dependence on his mother (0-1) to a sense of self (1-2), and finally to a separation of himself from his mother (2-3). Body images are strengthened as a child feels comfortable with his body and gains control of it.

Project P.I.A.G.E.T. self concept activities conducted by parents, in the home, allow the child to gain meaning from his interactions with his parents, in the home environment. As a child's cognition grows, his attitudes towards himself grow, and his knowledge of himself also grows.

Project P.I.A.G.E.T. activities for the social self include the cultural self. The expectations of the group, to which the child belongs, whether it be family, school, or other societal institutions are internalized by the child. These expectations determine the child's behavior. Children become aware of these expectations through interactions with others (e.g., parents, teachers, friends).

The fourth dimension of self concept activities from Project P.I.A.G.E.T. emphasize self esteem, which is the evaluative aspect. Bilingual children with high self esteems respect themselves (Coopersmith, 1967; Rosenberg, 1974; Felker, 1974) feel competent (Sears & Sherman, 1964; Diggory, 1966), and have a strong sense of belonging (Maslow, 1954; Felker, 1974). If their self esteem is low, they develop lack of respect for themselves and believe they are not successful (Coopersmith,

1967). Project P.I.A.G.E.T. self concept activities stress growth of respect and provide settings where bilingual children are significant, capable, successful and worthy.

Since a positive self-concept is stressed in Project P.I.A.G.E.T., oportunities are provided and delivered by parents, in the home, which foster healthy self concepts in their children. Examples of home activities from each of the dimensions of self concept follow.

Body Self. As the bilingual child feels comfortable with his body, he gains control over himself, and his body image is strengthened. Selected activities used to develop a sound body self include:

* Sing songs containing the children's names.
* Cut out pieces of people's bodies and make puzzles for the children to assemble. Provide music and instruments and allow them to express rhythm with their bodies.
* Play statues (a child must pretend he is a statue, and if he moves, and "it" sees him, then he becomes the new "it'). This helps the child gain control over his body.
* Have the child pretend he is doing an activity (drinking, sitting, etc.) in slow motion then in fast motion.
* Play games where no one wins or loses, so the children can experience success.
* Set-up a dress up corner with a mirror in it. Focus the discussion on the parts of the body and facial epxressions.
* Provide opportunities for the children to use scissors and thus become confident with them.
* Play games which require the children to run, jump and hop.

Cognitive Self. Understanding what goes on around the bilingual child makes him feel confident. Thus activities enhancing his cognitive self are desirable. Some of these activities include:

* Read to the child and provide a model by reading yourself.
* Provide materials that allow the child to create (e.g., glue, scissors, crayons) and then display his creations in the home.
* Encourage imagination and language development by having them enact and retell stories.
* Teach them songs and fingerplays to facilitate language development.

Social Self. It is important for the child to engage in appropriate behavior. This gives the bilingual child confidence in new situations. For example he will not be afraid that his behavior will embarrass his family or friends. Examples of Project P.I.A.G.E.T. activities that strengthen a child's social self follow:

* Arrange play activities where sharing of objects between parent and child take place.
* Encourage the use of proper manners during the day.
* Create activities where children must play with other children.
* Have them role play various occupations and explain how it feels.
* Have them exchange identities with you as mother or father and then explain what hapopened to them while they were the other person.
* Allow them to express their feelings through stories using puppets or dramatic play.

Self-Esteem. This dimension evolves as the bilingual child interacts with others, who are close to him. Through interactions with these people, the child decides whether he accepts and respects himself or not. Therefore, the manner in which parents react to children is very important. According to Coopersmith (1967), parents (and teachers) need to:

(a) Show continued warmth - The child senses warmth and concern from his parent.

(b) Treat respectfully - The child's views are considered, and

(c) Define limits clearly - The child knows, by the ways his parents (and teachers) treat him, that they care for him.

These parent (and teacher) personality characteristics give the child the feeling that he is worthy as a person. Some activities used by parents in Project P.I.A.G.E.T. to promote a child's self-esteem follow:

* Have the children make "me" books. Include pages on their family and pet. Allow them to share their books with others.

* Play games that allow the child to express his feelings. Start off sentences with "I am happy when..." or "I am sad when..." and have the child finish it.

Some additional activities to promote positive self-esteem in children include:

* Say more positive than negative things about the child and his behavior.

* Avoid labeling the child.

* Spend some time with each child by himself with no interruptions. During this time make the child feel he is the most important person in the world.

* Make the child feel that he is a member of the group and that he contributes to the group.

The activities selected from Project P.I.A.G.E.T. are just a few of many possible ones. Regardless of the self concept activities used in the home, it is important that all four dimensions of the self concept are selected for enhancement.

Summary

As research demonstrates, a child's self concept is very important to his learning and development both in school and at home. Although the bilingual child

has a poor self concept, he is no different from any other child in his ability to acquire and maintain a positive self concept given the proper support.

To improve the bilingual child's self concept, it is necessary to understand how a child's self concept develops. Studies show that parents play a key role (through their aspirations for the child and their interactions with the child) in the development of their child's self concept. As the youngster grows older, other people with whom the child interacts, shape and mold the child's self concept.

An example of plans and procedures to develop self concepts in bilingual children is Project P.I.A.G.E.T. This project, a Title VII project, was developed to work with bilingual families in both the home and school settings. Its objectives focus on self concept enhancement, increasing learning achievement, and developing more positive communication and interaction between child and parent. It has been successful after one year of implementation.

Lower socio-economic status and high unemployment rate characterize the bilingual families in the Title VII project. Based on these other characteristics, the bilingual program operates on six basic assumptions of learning and growth: (a) acquisition of intelligence, (b) specific linguistic/cognitive benchmarks crucial to growth, (c) experiences to expand language and cognitive growth, (d) self regulation of learning, (e) social interaction, and (f) the importance of child's play. These assumptions provide the baseline for self concept development.

Lastly, specific activities are given from the home component, which are used by parents to foster healthy self concepts in their children. These activities include: singing songs containing the child's name, reading to the child, role playing, and constructing "me" books. The activities are grouped according to the four different dimensions of the self concept: (a) body self, (b) social self, (c) cognitive self, and (d) self-esteem.

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